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## In Praise of the *Theologie Naturelle*\*

John O'Brien

This article deals with a hitherto unknown and unpublished English poem on the *Theologie Naturelle* of the Catalan theologian, Raymond Sebond or Sabunde. The MS is contained in a copy of the French translation by Michel de Montaigne held in Middle Temple Library. It is shown that the poem dates from the mid-seventeenth century and asserts the compatibility of faith and reason, while subordinating the latter to the former. The formal properties of the poem are investigated, including the thematic material it draws on from Sebond's own preface to his work and its echoes and parallels with the work of Du Bartas. Sebond's place in seventeenth-century English theological writing is outlined and it is argued that the anonymous author of this original poem espouses a particular view of the relationship between theology and philosophy against the background of the rise of the Royal Society, with which Middle Templars were prominently associated.

[fol. 1, v of flyleaf]

Of the Theologie

Of Raymond Sebond.

This Book doth teach vs how to spell, & read,  
& vnderstand, the Book of Nature plaine;  
W<sup>ch</sup> Gods own hand hath writt, & open spread  
To show the wonndrous skill it doth containe.

The Creatures all w<sup>ch</sup> euery where wee see,  
Ar but the Letters of that Volum fair:  
The Suñ; the Moone, the Starrs that fixed bee,  
The Earth, the Water, & the Empty Aier;

And all that therein Goes, creepes, swim~s, or flies,  
Each Stone, each Mettall, euery herb, or Tree:  
But Man, w<sup>ch</sup> doth a little World comprise,  
The cheef Character of that Book, is Hee,

Of all these things w<sup>ch</sup> fill this Volum~ wide,  
Some only bee, some bee, & live w<sup>th</sup>all  
& some have Beeing, life, & sense beside  
But Man, by Reasons light, transcends them all. ./

[fol. 2<sup>r</sup>]

This is the Scale of Creatures heer below,<sup>1</sup>  
The Jacobs Ladder, w<sup>ch</sup> by steps ascends  
From Earth to Heav'n, & leads vs up, to know  
The Cause of Causes, & the End, of Ends.

By these things seen to all, Gods power vnseen  
his wisdom, & his Goodnesse were reveal'd;  
Though since Mans fall, his sight so dimme hath been,  
as things most clear, were (as to him) conceal' {d}<sup>2</sup>

Though all w<sup>h</sup>out the Suñ to him did show;  
Though Reasons light w<sup>h</sup>in himself did shine<sup>3</sup>  
God, & Himself hee could not trewly know<sup>4</sup>  
w<sup>h</sup>out the help of other light diuine.

Tho Pagan Sages, w<sup>ch</sup> spent all their dayes<sup>5</sup>  
in studdy of that Vniversall Booke,  
knew not the Maker, gaue him not the pra{ise}<sup>6</sup>  
Though all their learned arts from thence they tooke<sup>7</sup>

But Man, while hee in Paradise did live<sup>8</sup>  
By skill infus'd, did all the Creatures know<sup>9</sup>  
Where hee to them their proper Names did giue,  
& in their Names, did all their Natures show.

And

[fol. 2<sup>v</sup>]

And<sup>10</sup> now again by Faith, when Reasons ei{e}<sup>11</sup>  
receaues<sup>12</sup> impression by a higher light,  
Soon doth a Christian learn, & soon apply  
The Letters of this Book, & lessons right.

And this is that w<sup>ch</sup> to this Author brings  
So clear imaginations, & so high:  
His Reasons take their ground from lowest things;  
And thence, by easy steps, surmount the sky.

The works of God doo speak their Makers praise:

That speach this writer doth interpret clear,  
& makes vs know what every creature sayes  
on this round globe, & in each heav'nly spheare.

Vppon the Booke of Creatures, never yet  
was there so bright a Glosse, or comment sett.

This is a transcription of a manuscript poem which occupies three pages (verso – recto – verso) of the front flyleaves of a copy of *La Theologie Naturelle de Raymond Sebon*, translated by Michel de Montaigne and published by Romain de Beauvais in Rouen in 1603. The copy is held in Middle Temple Library, London, under the pressmark BAY L530 and is bound in nineteenth-century half calf; both boards are detached. While its external condition is mediocre, internally, by contrast, this copy is generally fresh and clean, although the title page is dusty. This work carries some underlinings in the preface, but is otherwise free from notes or other obvious signs of reading. The manuscript poem is composed of twelve quatrains and a final rhyming couplet, making fifty lines of verse in all. The quatrains follow an alternating rhyme scheme of entirely masculine rhymes;<sup>13</sup> the meter is iambic pentameter.

Figure 1 shows the first page of the poem, easily the most legible. FIGURE 1 HERE

One authority has characterized the script as follows: ‘The MS is in a fairly standard mid-seventeenth-century italic script, not particularly distinctive, and with no clear evidence of authorial working composition except for one apparent correction on the page shown. I would say that chances are it is a non-professional copy’.<sup>14</sup> A date in the earlier part of that period, might seem plausible, based on the mixture of Greek and Italic minuscule ‘e’ that will be seen from the supplementary illustrations, and a distribution of letter forms broadly

similar to Milton's early hand.<sup>15</sup> From the supplementary illustrations, it will also be seen that some lines do not quite fit on the second and especially the third pages and so in some cases the last word of the line has been inserted beneath, often within a bracket. The question arises whether the poem was originally composed on these pages or copied there from another source, perhaps elsewhere in the author's papers. The rather deliberate style of the hand and the squeezing in of words might lend plausibility to the idea that the poem is an authorial copy from an original authorial draft. The heavy deletion of a word and the insertion of 'receau'es' above might also suggest that the writer had made a copying mistake rather than that he changed his mind in mid-composition. However, if this poem has been copied from elsewhere, the source remains as yet undiscovered. Montaigne's translation of the *Theologie Naturelle* has itself never received any translation into English and so there are no liminary poems to which our poet might have looked for inspiration. For the moment, no parallel is known to exist for the poem in our language.

In French, the only parallel poem is by François d'Amboise, which was printed for the first and only time in the original edition of the *Theologie Naturelle* in 1569. It runs as follows:

Tu nombres le sablon, & la Libique Aréne,  
Tu laboures le bord de l'escumeuse Mer,  
Sur la cime d'un mont tu tasches à ramer,  
Tu tasches à planer vne roche hautaine:  
  
Tu trauailles en vain, tu perds, tu perds ta peine,  
Si tu cuides pouuoir comprendre, & contempler  
L'essence du grand Dieu, qui ne veut point donner

De soy la cognoissance à la nature humaine.

Des choses la nature est vrayment vn indice

Qui de l'estre de Dieu nous donne la notice

(Si de l'estre de Dieu notice on peut auoir)[.]

C'est pourquoy la nature avec sa Thëologie,

Mieux que l'art graue en nous la naïue effigie

De Dieu, de son essence, & de son haut pouuoir.<sup>16</sup>

(You count the sand and the Libyan strand, you plough the edge of the foaming sea, on the peak of a hill you try to row, you try to plane a high rock. You toil in vain, you waste, you waste your labour if you think you are able to understand and to contemplate the essence of God who does not wish to give knowledge of Himself to human nature. Nature is truly a signpost of things, giving us understanding of God's being (if one can have understanding of God's being). That is why nature with its Theology engraves in us, better than art, the natural image of God, His essence and His high power.)

A comparison will quickly show that there is little verbal link between the two poems, although there is a thematic connection. Using *impossibilia* topoi, D'Amboise's sonnet deals with the inaccessibility of God, knowable only through Nature. According to him, it is nature 'with its Theology' which engraves in us the image of God, His essence and power. Like the English poem, D'Amboise's sonnet underscores the role of Nature as a way of understanding God, but does not comment on the pre- and post-lapsarian standing of human knowledge. The anonymous English poem, however, goes much further. It emphasises more affirmatively human reason, discusses the role of post-lapsarian enlightenment by faith and

claims that the scale of creatures is ‘The Jacobs Ladder, w<sup>ch</sup> by steps ascends/From Earth to Heav’n, & leads vs up to know/The Cause of Causes, & the End, of Ends’. From the evidence the English poem offers, it seems unlikely that it is related to D’Amboise’s sonnet, even indirectly; any similarities between them are due to the nature of Sebond’s work rather than to any intrinsic connection. This comes as no surprise. The French sonnet disappeared after 1569, never to be re-printed in subsequent French editions of the *Theologie Naturelle* (1581, 1605, 1611, 1641). It is accordingly not present in the 1603 edition, either in general or in this copy in particular. The English poem is not a translation or adaptation from any liminary poem in any French edition of the *Theologie Naturelle* or indeed the Latin original. There is no obvious external source for it.

In addition, the poem is anonymous. Who wrote it? The most obvious candidate might be thought to be Robert Ashley (1565-1641), the owner of this copy of the *Theologie Naturelle*, and the benefactor of Middle Temple Library, to which he bequeathed his entire collection of books, effectively re-founding the library after the ravages of the previous century.<sup>17</sup> Comparison with his handwriting, illustrated here from his copy of Plutarch (figure 2), shows no clear similarity between the two hands. FIGURE 2 HERE. However, this copy of the *Theologie Naturelle* contains underlinings in Sebond’s preface to the reader, a favourite habit of Ashley found in many of his other books. These underlinings do share some common concerns with the poem. The most prominent is the notion of the world as a set of letters. It is applied to creatures in general: ‘car chaque creature n’est que comme vne lettre, tiree par la main de Dieu’ (‘for each creature is but as a letter, drawn by the hand of God’) and to the idea of man in particular as the chief and capital letter: ‘dans lequel l’homme se trouve, & en est la lettre capitale et principale’ (‘in which man is found and is its capital and main letter’).<sup>18</sup> As the poem puts it, ‘The Creatures all w<sup>ch</sup> euery where wee see/



Ar but the Letters of that Volum fair'. This 'alphabetic' theme, where it occurs in the main body of the *Theologie Naturelle*, is in the minor key.<sup>19</sup> A further idea the poem shares with Ashley's underlinings is that of pagan philosophers too blind to see the true wisdom that lies at the heart of Nature:

les anciens philosophes payens, qui en [sc. de la Nature] ont tiré toutes leurs autres sciences & tout leur sçauoir, n'y ont pourtant iamais peu apercevoir & descourir (aueugles en ce qui concernoit leur souuerain bien) la sapience, qui y est enclose ...<sup>20</sup>

(the ancient pagan philosophers, who took from it [sc. Nature] all their other knowledge and all their learning, were however never able to perceive and discover in it (blind in respect of their sovereign good) the wisdom that is enclosed therein...)

The poem echoes these sentiments:

Tho Pagan Sages, w<sup>ch</sup> spent all their dayes  
in studdy of that Vniversall Booke,  
knew not the Maker, gaue him not the pra{ise}  
Though all their learned arts from thence they tooke

The last line here is all but a translation of the words highlighted by Ashley. In the same way, self-knowledge, found on the very first page of Sebond's preface, is again underscored by Ashley: 'illuminé à se cognoistre soy-mesme, son createur' ('enlightened to know himself, his creator').<sup>21</sup> This in turn is reflected at one point in the poem: 'God, & Himself hee could not trewly know/ w<sup>h</sup>out the help of other light diuine', although its sense is altered from

positive in Sebond to negative in the poem. In addition, the very subject-matter of the book, given on the first page of the preface 'du liure des creatures: ou liure de Nature' ('of the book of creatures: or book of Nature'),<sup>22</sup> occurs at the beginning of the poem ('the Book of Nature') and at the end ('the Booke of Creatures').

On the other hand, just as there are elements picked out by Ashley that are not taken up in the poem,<sup>23</sup> so, conversely, there are sections of the preface without underlining but nevertheless developed within the poem. One major instance is a long sentence near the end of Sebond's address to the reader:

A cette cause bastit elle [*sc.* la diuine intelligence] ce monde visible & nous le donna comme vn liure propre, familier & infallible, escrit de sa main, où les creatures sont reneees ainsi que lettres non à nostre poste, mais par le saint iugement de Dieu, pour nous apprendre la sapience & la science de nostre salut: laquelle toutesfois nul ne peut voir de soy, ni lire en ce grand liure (bien que tousiours ouuert & present à nos yeux) s'il n'est esclairé de Dieu & purgé de sa macule originelle.<sup>24</sup>

(To that end, it [*sc.* divine intelligence] built this visible world and gave it to us as a proper, familiar and infallible book, written by its hand, in which creatures are drawn up like letters not as we would have it, but by the holy judgement of God, to teach us the wisdom and knowledge of our salvation: which however none can see by himself or read in this great book (albeit always open and present to our eyes) if he be not enlightened by God and purged of his original stain.)

The opening of the poem takes up some of these ideas:

This Book doth teach vs how to spell, & read  
& vnderstand, the Book of Nature plaine,  
W<sup>ch</sup> Gods own hand hath writt, & open spread  
To show the wondrous skill it doth containe.

The Creatures all w<sup>ch</sup> euery where wee see,  
Ar but the Letters of that Volum fair:

Further on, the remainder of these ideas are transposed:

By these things seen to all, Gods power vnseen  
his wisdom, & his Goodnesse were reveal'd;  
Though since Mans fall his sight so dimme hath been,  
as things most clear, were (as to him) conceal' {d}

Likewise, when the poem says of Sebond: 'His Reasons take their ground from lowest things;/And thence, by easy steps, surmount the sky', this description seems to echo the Catalan author's explanation of his task: 'd'autant qu'elle [*sc.* ceste doctrine] part de plus bas, d'autant monte-elle & s'eleue aux choses hautes & celestes' ('to the extent that it (*sc.* this doctrine) starts lowest down, to that extent it climbs and rises up to high, heavenly things').<sup>25</sup>

Of the elements in the poem not indebted to the preface or Ashley's underlinings, brief mention can be made of the Biblical references to Paradise, the Fall and, from Genesis

28:10-19, Jacob's ladder. Whatever their corresponding incidence in Sebond's work – and the Fall makes a particularly strong showing<sup>26</sup> – their utter familiarity in the culture of the day enables their deployment as part of the symbolic narrative framework of the poem, a way of organising its thematic concerns and ensuring the predominance of the theological outlook. The juxtaposition of this Biblical vocabulary with the language of 'The Cause of Causes, & the End, of Ends', scholastic and Aristotelian in origin and flavour, bespeaks the desire to reconcile Biblical and philosophical perspectives, using a lexis which would have been familiar from a number of sources and which was also used in natural theology contexts.<sup>27</sup> A more specific allusion to Sebond is contained in the lines 'Some only bee, some bee, & live w<sup>th</sup>all/& some have Beeing, life, & sense beside', which draw on his reflections about the distinctions in being, sentience and life along the scale of creatures, such as the following claim made near the opening of the *Theologie Naturelle*: 'Tout ce qui est, ou il a l'estre seulement sans vie, sans sentiment, sans intelligence, sans iugement, sans libre volonté: ou bien il a l'estre & le viure seulement, & rien du reste, ou bien il est, il vit, il sent, il entend, & veut à sa liberté' ('All that exists, either has being alone without life, without feeling, without intelligence, without judgement, without free will; or alternatively it has being and life only and none of the rest, or alternatively it exists, it lives, it feels, it understands and seeks for its freedom').<sup>28</sup> This is the first clear statement of an axiom which occurs persistently in a variety of formulations in at least the first seventy chapters of the *Theologie Naturelle*; while it is thus not possible to pinpoint a single source remark which would have given rise to the lines, this initial statement would be a likely one.

Beyond these echoes and parallels stands a particular influential model: Du Bartas. Thematically and to an extent lexically, our poem bathes in an atmosphere familiar from the *Weeks*. Nor is that influence very far to seek. A series of key statements at the very beginning

of the first day of the first week are reminiscent of views put forward by our poem. For example, Du Bartas makes the following analogy:

The World's a Booke in *Folio*, printed all  
With God's great Workes in Letters Capitall:  
Each Creature, is a Page, and each effect  
A faire Character, void of all defect.<sup>29</sup>

The parallel with both Sebond and with our poem is striking, recurs elsewhere in Du Bartas<sup>30</sup> and is reinforced by the notion of lessons to be drawn from reading this work, when the poet bids his readers:

... never further for our *Lesson* looke  
Within the Volume of this various Booke:  
Where learned nature rudest ones instructs,  
That by his wisdom God the World conducts.<sup>31</sup>

A similar outlook is presented in our manuscript poem, which would further agree with Du Bartas on the role of faith:

To read this Booke, we need not understand  
Each Strangers gibberish; ...  
Therefore, by *Faith's* pure rayes illumined  
These sacred *Pandects* I desire to read;<sup>32</sup>

Other parallels in Du Bartas are the book as a means of self-knowledge,<sup>33</sup> man as a microcosm,<sup>34</sup> and the world as – if not a scale of creatures or Jacob’s ladder – nonetheless ‘A paire of Staires, whereby our mounting soule/Ascends by steps above the Arched Pole’.<sup>35</sup> Du Bartas appealed to an educated readership which admired his work ‘as an authoritative repository of knowledge’ and it is worth noting in the same context that Robert Ashley had produced a Latin version of ‘L’Uranie’ while at Middle Temple.<sup>36</sup>

Three of the manuscript poem’s most important ideas – reason, faith and light – while enjoying no place in Sebond’s preface, have nevertheless an important role in his text as a whole and are similarly crucial to the thrust and tone of the English poem. In that respect, it may be that the interest in Sebond displayed by the poem, individual as it is, arises in a context of debate about the status and role of natural theology in seventeenth-century England. The importance of this debate hardly needs re-emphasis. Barbara Shapiro, for example, has contextualized seventeenth-century English views of religion against the background of broader developments across disciplines such as law, history, science and literature.<sup>37</sup> More recently, Scott Mandelbrote has helpfully outlined the uses of natural theology in this period, arguing that the operation of the universe under the providential order came to oppose, not complement, the wondrousness of Nature evidenced, for the Cambridge Neo-Platonists, by the marvellous and by spiritual phenomena;<sup>38</sup> while the many influential studies by Peter Harrison assess in detail the function of science, natural philosophy and religion against the background of the rise of the Royal Society, founded as the Gresham College group, and itself the successor to the Wadham College group under the leadership of John Wilkins.<sup>39</sup> As Katherine Calloway comments, one central issue in natural theology revolved around the ‘epistemological authority’ of nature.<sup>40</sup> Our anonymous poem makes its position clear on these matters. It seeks to promote the compatibility of faith and philosophy,

religion and reason.<sup>41</sup> ‘The Book of Nature’<sup>42</sup> is written by ‘Gods own hand’, so that all creatures are ‘but the Letters of that Volum fair’. However, the centre piece of creation, ‘the cheef Character’, is man, and the human drama is integrated into the overall conceptual scheme of the poem. This is exactly the outlook that Sebond himself champions, as Jaume Puig has noted.<sup>43</sup> Again following the Catalan’s lead,<sup>44</sup> the poem is especially insistent about the primacy of human reason. By contrast, it is silent about free will which Sebond sees as the distinctive characteristic of man or the connections he draws in his preface between the two books, the Bible and the Book of Creatures.<sup>45</sup> At Creation, according to our poem, man was endowed with reason, thus distinguishing him from all other existents on ‘the Scale of Creatures’. By infused knowledge, he showed his understanding of the nature of animals by giving them their proper names in Paradise; Peter Harrison observes that this ability was itself taken as evidence of primitive science.<sup>46</sup> Correspondingly, after the Fall, though reason’s light shines undimmed, yet man can no longer know God except by divine assistance: reason is now subordinated to the light of faith. By way of an encompassing framework for these reflections, the poem also makes an implicit parallel between the book of creatures written by God in the opening stanza and the book about the book of creatures in the closing stanzas, the ‘bright Glosse’ which is the work of Sebond. In both cases, reading is a vital activity: reading *this* book by Sebond will teach one, ‘by easy steps’, how to read the book of creatures, with the intended consequence that ‘[s]oon doth a Christian learn, & soon apply/The Letters of this Book, & lessons right’. The play on the two types of book, the literal and the metaphorical, is refracted throughout the poem in the numerous references to the act of writing and its related activities: ‘spell, & read’, ‘Volum’, ‘writt’, in addition to the paronomasia of ‘Letters’ and ‘lessons’ just cited, all woven in with motifs of understanding, learning, knowing, seeing and speaking. Such poetic devices help underline the epistemological legibility that the poet grants the combination of faith and ‘Reasons eie’ in

their encounter with the natural world, as part of the overall momentum rising from earthly things to their Creator.

This is not the only occurrence of Sebond in seventeenth-century natural theology. Indeed, there was a degree of familiarity with his work which was more than merely passing. His outlook was also congenial to John Wilkins, as Barbara Shapiro has demonstrated,<sup>47</sup> and John Wilkins' pupil Walter Charleton, an early member of the Royal Society, made use of Sebond in two separate works.<sup>48</sup> He was likewise referred to as an authority by a chronologically wide and theologically diverse range of authors such as Stephen Jerome, Charles Fitzgeffry, Guy Holland, Francis Cheynell, the Middle Templar Edward Leigh, and Edward Polhill.<sup>49</sup> He also attracted the attention of John Donne and Sir Thomas Browne. Where Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* is content to state that Sebond 'hath written a naturall Theologie, demonstrating therein the Attributes of God, and attempting the like in most points of Religion',<sup>50</sup> Donne goes further in his *Essayes in Divinity*. Here the Dean of St Paul's summarises Sebond's contentions in the preface to the *Theologie Naturelle* that the book of creatures is 'an Art, which teaches al things, presupposes no other, is soon learned, cannot be forgotten, requires no books, needs no witnesses, and in this, is safer then the Bible it self, that it cannot be falsified by Hereticks'.<sup>51</sup> He then adds the claim, made in the very short chapter 166 of the *Theologie Naturelle*, 'That because his book is made according to the Order of Creatures, which express fully the will of God, whosoever doth according to his booke, fulfils the will of God'.<sup>52</sup> The Catalan author's statement is consistent with his view that the order of creatures cannot lie because it has been ordained by God and that his book is truthful because it reflects both that order and that ordinance. When, however, Sebond ventures further to suggest that the book of creatures, and so his book, contain 'all particularities of Christian Religion', the Dean parts company with him.<sup>53</sup> His discussion of



Sebond, though reasonably brief, demonstrates some of the conflicting opinions which the *Theologie Naturelle* could spark. Donne's near contemporary, the Royalist poet Francis Quarles, is a case in point. His *Diuine Fancies* of 1633 contain an epigram and a meditation about the Catalan, neither appreciative.<sup>54</sup> Yet, not ten years before, his *Iob Militant* of 1624 contains three re-workings of points from Sebond, who is openly acknowledged in a shoulder note each time.<sup>55</sup> In general, however, the more Calvinistically-minded the writer, the likelier he was to be critical of Sebond. In his attack on Thomas Jackson's Platonizing commentary on the Creed, William Twisse of New College, Oxford, mocked his opponent by ridiculing Sebond's claim 'to make a Man a perfect Divine, within the space of a monthe; and that without any knowledge to prepare him, so much as the knowledge of Grammar'.<sup>56</sup> The New England Puritan, Thomas Shepard, deplored the fact that Sebond was being regarded as a 'new beacon' whose only effect, he thought, would be to extinguish the light of the Gospel.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, in a deriding retort to Jasper Mayne in 1646, the Presbyterian Francis Cheynell scoffed, 'You may study the *Lullian Art*, & fill your *braine* with *Sebund's fancies*'.<sup>58</sup> Within this framework, it can be seen that the sympathies of our anonymous poet are unambiguously in favour of the Catalan author, who belongs to a wider tradition of debate and discussion in English theological works.

In terms of our document's institutional context, it has been claimed that the sharp decline in admissions at the Inns of Court during the Civil Wars contributed to the end of the 'education boom' and to the decline of the cultural and intellectual vibrancy that had characterised the Inns during the Renaissance and the early Stuart period up to the outbreak of hostilities.<sup>59</sup> At Middle Temple, admissions were at a low ebb in the war years of the early to mid-1640s, and again in the early 1650s, but rose once more during the period 1654-58 before another decline during 1658-60.<sup>60</sup> Sir John Baker specifies that by the Restoration

‘the formal part of legal education, the “readings” and the exercises of the Inns of Court, was killed off by the disruption of the previous eighteen years’;<sup>61</sup> and certainly we have at least one detailed account of the difficulties of life as a student at the Restoration Inns by the Middle Templar, Roger North (1651-1734; admitted 1669, benchers 1682, treasurer 1683).<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, Barbara Shapiro cites John Aubrey’s testimony that ‘the first beginning of the Royal Society ... was in the Chamber of William Ball in the Middle Temple’<sup>63</sup> in November 1660 and she also emphasises the fashionable nature of scientific acquaintance among the sons of the gentry who populated the Inn.<sup>64</sup> In addition to Ball, at least two other Middle Templars were also founding members of the Royal Society: John Evelyn (1620-1706; admitted to Middle Temple 1637) and John Aubrey (1626-97; admitted to Middle Temple 1646). Against this background, the manuscript poem we have been discussing defends a strong view of the relationship between reason and faith and uses Sebond’s work to argue for a physico-theological concept of nature. Peter Harrison has repeatedly and strenuously argued that such a view would not necessarily have been antipathetic to the outlook of the Royal Society, which did not in his opinion consecrate a total separation between science and religion, as has been often maintained.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, for the time being, while the poet remains unidentified, we can say that he would probably have been a Middle Templar, not least because this copy of the *Theologie Naturelle* has never ventured out of Middle Temple Library since Ashley’s bequest of his books. We could also speculate that if the poet was not Ashley himself – and the handwriting bears no likeness – he may have copied out a pre-existing but otherwise unknown poem by Ashley onto the flyleaves of this copy of the *Theologie Naturelle*, perhaps after Ashley’s death in 1641. Alternatively, he may have been another mid-seventeenth-century reader most likely making a fair copy of his own original reaction to the *Theologie*, especially in the light

of then-current debates about God, nature and reason. This reader seems to have been inspired by Ashley's underlinings in the preface, but he also cast his net wider, sometimes to include other ideas from the preface not underlined by Ashley, and on occasion to introduce other material from Sebond's text or from the broader cultural and biblical tradition. In the present state of knowledge, it is not possible to state for certain which of these hypotheses about the author of the poem is true, although the evidence seems to point to the latter. The poem's handwriting gives only an approximate indication of the precise point in the mid-seventeenth century it was composed. Yet the very fact of its existence does demonstrate interest in matters of intense debate at a crucial moment in English intellectual history.

University of Durham

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<sup>1</sup> Last two letters torn but legible.

<sup>2</sup> End of letter 'd' and punctuation missing.

<sup>3</sup> End of letter and punctuation missing.

<sup>4</sup> End of letter and punctuation missing.

<sup>5</sup> End of letter and punctuation missing.

<sup>6</sup> End of word supplied; punctuation also missing.

<sup>7</sup> Punctuation missing.

<sup>8</sup> Punctuation missing.

<sup>9</sup> Punctuation missing.

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<sup>10</sup> Top of letter ‘A’ torn.

<sup>11</sup> Last letter partly torn off.

<sup>12</sup> Written over the top of another word heavily deleted and illegible.

<sup>13</sup> The rhyme is faulty at ‘below/vp to’.

<sup>14</sup> Dr Peter Beal, personal communication, 16 October 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Dr Colin Burrow, who also concurs about the non-professional nature of the hand, personal communication, 8 February 2013.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Sur la Theologie Naturelle de Raymond Sebon, sonet, par François d’Amboise, Parisien, Escolier du roy’, *La Theologie Naturelle de Raymond Sebon*, tr. Michel de Montaigne (Paris, 1569), [a ij v]; cf. Daniela Costa, ‘Montaigne et François d’Amboise’ in *La ‘familia’ de Montaigne*, John O’Brien (ed.), *Montaigne Studies* 13 (2001), 175-86.

<sup>17</sup> On Ashley’s bequest, see now Renae Satterley, “‘To be unto them as the foundation of a library’: The Books of Robert Ashley at the Middle Temple”, in *The Early Modern Book Trade in England*, John Hicks and Victoria Gardner (eds) (London and New Castle, Delaware, forthcoming 2013). This copy of the *Theologie naturelle* is listed in *Bibliotheca illustris Medii Templi Societatis* (London, 1700), 161: ‘Theologie Naturele de Raym. Sebonde ... 1603’, classified under *Libri Theologici in Lingua Gallica. In Octavo*. For Ashley’s biography, see the *Oxford DNB*, Virgil B. Heltzel, ‘Robert Ashley: Elizabethan Man of Letters’, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 10 (1947), 349-63 and Ashley’s own account of his life in London British Library Sloane 2131, fols 16-20. His portrait hanging in Middle Temple Library is reproduced and discussed in Elizabeth Goldring, ‘Introduction: The Art, Architecture and Gardens of the Early Modern Inns of Court’ in *The Intellectual and Cultural World of the Early Modern Inns of Court*, Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring and Sarah Knight (eds) (Manchester, 2011), 127-37 (131-33).

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<sup>18</sup> *La Theologie Naturelle de Raymond Sebon*, tr. Michel de Montaigne (Rouen, 1603), sig. [ã vi<sup>v</sup>]. **Here and elsewhere**, Ashley's underlinings are indicated. **A little earlier**, Ashley highlights the words 'comme est vn Alphabet en tous escrits' (ã iiij<sup>r</sup>), in a sentence referring to the doctors of the Church, but this is not taken up in the English poem.

<sup>19</sup> Short exceptions, in a work of nearly 900 pages, are two sections on the letter A (the 'Universal A') as an image of the soul and the nature of Christ, and another on letters as analogies for the union of two natures, *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), 459-61, 748, 627-30 respectively. The idea is however picked up by George Sikes, *The Life and Death of Sir Henry Vane, Kt* (London, 1662), 54: 'The whole first Creation, without humane Words, is a piece of dumb but significant Rhetorick, to express the second, and things thereof. [...]. *Raymund, de sabunde*, seems to have spoken notably towards the exposition of this creature Book. As the first whole creation in general, is letter, shadow, and expression of the second, so more particularly, is the first *Adam* in his primitive natural perfection, type, letter, or figure of the second [...]'.

<sup>20</sup> *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), [ã vii<sup>v</sup>].

<sup>21</sup> *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), ã iiij<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), ã iiij<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>23</sup> For example, that the *Theologie Naturelle* contains an appropriate, natural and useful doctrine of man and all that to which he is bound as man (ã iiij<sup>v</sup>), that the book of nature cannot be falsified or wrongly interpreted ( [ã vi<sup>v</sup>]) and that no-one became a heretic by reading it (*id.*).

<sup>24</sup> *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), [ã vii<sup>v</sup>].

<sup>25</sup> *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), [ã v<sup>v</sup>].

<sup>26</sup> *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), 490-511 and elsewhere.

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<sup>27</sup> For an example of the first, see Alexander Ross, *Pansebeia; or, A View of all the Religions in the World* (London, 1655), 127, ascribing the expression ‘cause of causes’ to Simplicius as well as to Aristotle, and the expression ‘end of ends’ to Proclus. For the second, see Richard Baxter, *The Reasons of the Christian Religion* (London, 1667), 19 (God as the ‘Cause of Causes’).

<sup>28</sup> *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), 5.

<sup>29</sup> *The Divine Weeks and Works of Guillaume de Saluste Sieur du Bartas*, tr. Joshua Sylvester, ed. Susan Snyder, 2 vols (Oxford, 1979), I, 116, vv. 173-76. On the success and influence of this work, see Peter Auger, ‘The *Semaines*’ Dissemination in England and Scotland until 1641’, *Renaissance Studies* 26 (2011), 625-40.

<sup>30</sup> Du Bartas, *Divine Weeks and Works*, Second Day of the First Week, I, 143, vv. 269-72: ‘Or, as of twice twelve *Letters*, thus transposed,/This World of Words is variously composed;/And of these Words, in divers orders sowne,/This sacred *Volume* that you read, is growne’.

<sup>31</sup> Du Bartas, *Divine Weeks and Works*, First Day of the First Week, I, 116, vv. 181-84; cf. Seventh Day of the First Week, I, 307, vv. 461, 463-64: ‘Heare this dumbe Doctor, studie in this Booke/.../And thereby learne uprightly how to live:/For every part doth speciall Lessons give’.

<sup>32</sup> Du Bartas, *Divine Weeks and Works*, First Day of the First Week, I, 116, vv. 185-86 and 117, vv. 197-99.

<sup>33</sup> Du Bartas, *Divine Weeks and Works*, First Day of the First Week, I, 111, vv. 11-12: ‘And graunt therein, thy power I may discerne,/That teaching others, I my selfe may learne’; Sixth Day of the First Week, I, 274, vv. 419-20: ‘There’s under the Sunne (as *Delphos* God did know)/No better Knowledge then *Our selfe to Know*’.

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<sup>34</sup> Du Bartas, *Divine Weeks and Works*, Sixth Day of the First Week, I, 274, v. 424: ‘Man’s (in a word) the World’s Epitome’.

<sup>35</sup> Du Bartas, *Divine Weeks and Works*, First Day of the First Week, I, 116, vv. 159-60.

<sup>36</sup> Auger, ‘The *Semaines*’ Dissemination’, 625, 629.

<sup>37</sup> Barbara Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton, 1983), ‘Religion’, 74-118.

<sup>38</sup> Scott Mandelbrote, ‘The Uses of Natural Theology in Seventeenth-Century England’, *Science in Context* 20/3 (2007), 451-80.

<sup>39</sup> Peter Harrison, *The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science* (Cambridge, 1998), *The Fall of Man and the Foundations of Science* (Cambridge, 2007), *Christianity and the Rise of Western Science* (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>40</sup> Katherine Calloway, *God’s Scientists: The Renovation of Natural Theology in England, 1653-1692*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of British Columbia, 2010, 3. Consulted 12 November 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Another point on which the poem is aligned with Sebond’s initiative: see Thomas Woolford, *Natural Theology and Natural Philosophy in the Late Renaissance*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2011, chapter 4, ‘Raymond Sebond’s *Theologia Naturalis* (1484)’, 156. Consulted 8 February 2013. Woolford’s whole chapter (150-62) is devoted to an analysis of this work.

<sup>42</sup> For this image, see Peter Harrison, “‘The Book of Nature’ and Early Modern Science”, in *The Book of Nature in Early Modern and Modern History*, Klaas van Berkel and Arjo Vanderjagt (eds) (Louvain, 2006), 1-26.

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<sup>43</sup> See Jaume Puig, *Les Sources de la pensée philosophique de Raimond Sebond* (Paris, 1994), 232, speaking of Sebond's 'vaste effort pour enraciner dans l'homme et élucider à partir de l'homme lui-même l'essentiel de la révélation chrétienne' ('vast effort to anchor within man and to elucidate starting with man himself the essence of Christian revelation').

<sup>44</sup> See Mireille Habert, *Montaigne traducteur de la 'Theologie naturelle': 'Plaisantes et saintes imaginations'* (Paris, 2010), 128: Sebond wishes to 'démontrer tous les articles de la foi chrétienne grâce à la raison naturelle, indépendamment des Écritures' ('demonstrate all the articles of Christian revelation thanks to natural reason, independently of the Scriptures').

<sup>45</sup> For free will, see *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), 109-11 ('Aussi est-ce le liberal arbitre qui nous separe des autres choses: & à cause de luy dit-on que l'homme se sied au dessus de toutes les creatures' 'Thus free will distinguishes us from other things; and because of it it is said that man takes his seat above all creatures', 111); on the question of two books, Ashley had singled out and highlighted the phrase 'deux liures, celuy de l'vniuersel ordre des choses ou de la nature, & celuy de la Bible' ('two books, that of the universal order of things or of nature, and that of the Bible'), *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), [ã vi '].

<sup>46</sup> Peter Harrison, *'Religion' and the Religions in the English Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1990), 19: 'Most important for later justifications of a primitive science, Adam had given names to all of the beasts in an episode traditionally taken to mean that Adam had been possessed of a knowledge of their essential natures'.

<sup>47</sup> Barbara Shapiro, *John Wilkins, 1614-1672. An Intellectual Biography* (Berkeley and London, 1969), 71, 232.

<sup>48</sup> Walter Charleton, *The Darknes of Atheism dispelled by the Light of Nature* (London, , 1652), 16, 17; *id.*, *The Harmony of Natural and Positive Divine Laws* (London, 1682), p. 208 ('Philosophic subtilty').



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<sup>49</sup> Stephen Jerome, *Englands Iubilee* (Dublin, 1625), 6 (Sebond as a precursor ‘in naturall and symbollicall Theologie’); Charles Fitz-Geffry, *Compassion towards Captives* (Oxford, 1637), 5, 10 (shoulder notes); Francis Cheynell, *The Diuine Trinunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit* (London, 1650), 1 (shoulder note), 7; G[uy] H[olland], *The Grand Prerogative of Humane Nature* (London, 1653), 53; Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Religion and Learning* (London, 1656), 312 (‘He hath written and excellent Book, called *Theologia naturalis*, sive *Liber Creaturarum*’); Edward Polhill, *Precious Faith* (London, 1675), 328.

<sup>50</sup> Sir Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, ed. Robin Robbins, 2 vols (Oxford, 1981), I, 42.

<sup>51</sup> John Donne, *Essayes in Divinity* (London, 1651), 7. Donne is referring to views set out in *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), ã iiij<sup>v</sup>, [ã v<sup>r</sup>], [ã v<sup>v</sup>]-[ã vi<sup>r</sup>]. We can, in passing, rule out Donne’s authorship of our poem. Ashley’s bequest certainly contained books from the library of the Dean of St Paul’s: see Keith Whitlock, ‘The Robert Ashley Founding Bequest to Middle Temple Library and John Donne’s Library’, *Sederi* 14 (2004), 153-75. Yet a major problem is that we possess little in Donne’s autograph and what we do possess does not particularly bear a likeness to the hand which interests us.

<sup>52</sup> Donne, *Essayes in Divinity*, 8; *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), 320.

<sup>53</sup> Donne, *Essayes in Divinity*, 8; Donne is most likely thinking of the following claim from the preface of *La Theologie Naturelle* (1603), ã iij<sup>v</sup>: ‘ceste doctrine aprend a tout homme de voir à l’œil sans difficulté & sans peine la verité, autant qu’il est possible à la raison naturelle pour la connoissance de Dieu & de soy-mesme, & de ce dequoy il a besoin pour son salut, & pour paruenir à la vie eternelle [...]’ (‘this doctrine teaches every man to see the truth plainly, without difficulty and labour, as far as it is possible to natural reason for the knowledge of God and oneself, and what one needs for one’s salvation and to gain eternal life’).

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<sup>54</sup> Francis Quarles, *Diuine Fancies digested into Epigrammes, Meditations, and Observations* (London, 1633), book 2, no. 65, 88-89, 'On Raymond Sebund' ('I Wonder, *Raymond*, thy illustrious *Witt*') and book 4, no. 61, 184, 'On Raymond Sebund' ('HOnour to high-brain'd *Raymond*...').

<sup>55</sup> Francis Quarles, *Iob Militant* (London, 1624), 44, 51, 52.

<sup>56</sup> William Twisse, *A Discovery of D. Iacksons vanitie* (Imprinted 1631), section 1, 17. On this dispute, see the *Oxford DNB* entry for William Twisse by E. C. Vernon (accessed 13 March 2013), which further refers to Sarah Hutton, 'Thomas Jackson, Oxford Platonist, and William Twisse, Aristotelian', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 39 (1978), 635–52.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas Shephard, *Theses Sabbaticae, or, The Doctrine of the Sabbath* (London, 1650), 67.

<sup>58</sup> Francis Cheynell reported in Jasper Mayne, 'A Late Printed Sermon against False Prophets', in *Certain Sermons and Letters of Defence and Resolution* (London, 1653), 32.

<sup>59</sup> Wilfrid R. Prest, *The Inns of Court under Elizabeth I and the Early Stuarts, 1590-1640* (London, 1972), 237; J. H. Baker, *The Legal Profession and the Common Law: Historical Essays* (London, 2003), 31-38. Prest goes on to argue that as a result of the Civil War 'the importance and prestige attached to education by the national economic and political élites declined very rapidly' (*loc. cit.*), but that in the event the Inns were already on the way to developing unique standing among professional associations.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Raffield, *Images and Cultures of the Law in Early Modern England: Justice and Political Power, 1558-1660* (Cambridge, 2004), 248.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Alan Cromartie, *Sir Matthew Hale, 1609-1676: Law, Religion, Natural Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1995), 118.

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<sup>62</sup> See Thomas W. Evans, ‘Study at the Restoration Inns of Court’, in *Learning the Law: Teaching and Transmission of the English Law, 1150-1900*, Jonathan Bush and Alain Wijffels (eds) (London, 1999), 287-302. On North, see also Jamie C. Kassler, *The Honourable Roger North, 1651-1734: On Life, Morality, Law and Tradition* (Farnham, 2009).

<sup>63</sup> Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 170. William Ball (d. 1690) appears in the Society’s first charter of 1662. See further Michael Hunter, *The Royal Society and its Fellows, 1660-1700: The Morphology of an Early Scientific Institution* (Chalfont St Giles, 1982); *id.*, *Establishing the New Science: The Experience of the Early Royal Society* (Woodbridge, 1989); *id.*, ‘The Founder Members of the Royal Society’, *Oxford DNB* (2006) accessed 6 May 2013.

<sup>64</sup> Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty*, 170, 171; Mordecai Feingold, *The Mathematician’s Apprenticeship: Science, Universities and Society in England, 1560-1640* (Cambridge, 1984).

<sup>65</sup> In addition to the works cited in note 39 above, see the same author’s ‘Religion and the Early Royal Society’, *Science and Christian Belief* 22 (2010), 3-22; *id.*, ‘Religion, the Royal Society, and the Rise of Science’, *Theology and Science*, 6 (2008), 255-71; *id.*, ‘Physico-Theology and the Mixed Sciences: The Role of Theology in Early Modern Natural Philosophy’, in *The Science of Nature in the Seventeenth Century*, Peter Anstey and John Schuster (eds) (Dordrecht, 2005), 165-183.